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GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD.

AMERICA.

AGRICULTURE IN ALASKA.—The Department of Agriculture and the War Department explorers have been collecting information with regard to the agricultural possibilities of Alaska.* The testimony of settlers also contributes to establish the fact that Alaska will have considerable development in that line. For 400 miles along the southeast coast, from Prince of Wales Island to Cape Fairweather, the influences favorable to vegetation include fairly abundant precipitation, a temperate climate, due to the Japan current, an unusual amount of summer sunshine and a deep, rich soil. These characteristics, in a lesser degree, are now found to extend 600 miles farther west, beyond Cook Inlet and penetrating inland, in places, at least 125 miles from the coast. Many hundreds of bushels of potatoes and all common vegetables are now raised at Tyoonok and other settlements along Cook Inlet. Lieut. Learnard, Fourteenth Infantry, tells of dinners at Cook Inlet at which everything on the table was raised in Alaska except the flour and butter. Excellent butter is made in the neighborhood of Sitka. Fine oats have been matured at Cook Inlet. The failure of the first attempt to raise wheat there was perhaps due to very late sowing in the fall. The station of the Department of Agriculture at Cook Inlet is continuing its experiments with wheat. Lieut. Castner, Fourth Infantry, says grass is abundant not only in the river bottoms of that region but also above the timber line, and that the bunch grass is especially nutritious. Capt. Glenn's expedition of 1898 reported that along the great valley of the Sushitna river the grass was of fine quality and would support a large amount of stock. The drawbacks to stock-raising are the long winters, which would necessitate curing a great deal of hay, and perhaps the mosquitoes and other troublesome insects. Capt. Abercrombie says the development of agriculture in the Copper River region, farther east, will be conditional only upon finding a market for the produce. Mr. Sittell reports from Copper Centre, 125 miles inland, that practically all vegetables may be raised there. Mr. William Ogilvie, at Dawson, has estimated the agricultural area of the upper Yukon at about 460,000 acres, but it is probable that the produce of this region will be confined to a few hardier vegetables. It is likely that what is achieved on the extreme northern farming lands of Europe may be done in Alaska. Drainage, transportation and markets will offer serious problems, but Alaska may in time produce all the food required by its inhabitants.

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* See "Agricultural Experiments in Alaska," by C. C. Georgeson, M. S.; "Year Book of the Department of Agriculture, 1898;" also "Reports of Explorations in the Territory of Alaska;" War Department, No. XXV., 1899.

CANADA'S CANALS.—The new locks in the St. Lawrence canals, completed in November last, admit vessels of 270 feet, and the entire system has been deepened to fourteen feet. The steamer *Porto Rico*, 250 feet long, has arrived at New York from the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence river. Between the Lake Erie entrance to the Welland canal and Montreal there are 84 miles of canals. The remainder is lake and river navigation, where steamers may move at their best speed, and from Montreal there is deep water to the sea. The canals formerly had a depth of only nine feet and their original cost and the later improvements have involved an expenditure of over $60,000,000. The new facilities will augment the commercial importance of Montreal; but if the St. Lawrence canal system is to be made available for the larger lake shipping a vast expenditure will still be required to give the canals adequate depth.

THE FATE OF THE IBARRETA EXPEDITION.—The Argentine newspapers print all the details known of the tragic fate of the expedition led by Enrique Ibarreta, the civil engineer, who set out on May 8, 1898, to descend the Pilcomayo River from its source in the highlands of Bolivia through the plain of the Gran Chaco to the Paraguay. On December 21 two of the party reached Asuncion, seeking relief for the expedition which had surveyed the river for 400 miles and had reached the swamps of Patino, 200 miles above the Paraguay. Their supply of provisions gave out and game was not sufficiently abundant to support the party. The leader sent eight men down the river to procure relief and he and two comrades remained with the boats. The eight men had no food for days, and six of them perished, only two reaching the Paraguay at last in terrible plight. Dr. José Montero was sent up to Pilcomayo with food supplies, and found indubitable evidence that Ibarreta and his two companions had been massacred and their small boats destroyed by Indians. Thus nine of the eleven members of the party perished.

ASIA.

A STEAM ROUTE ACROSS ASIA.—The Siberian railroad was completed on December 28 to Stretensk, 693 miles east of the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. Work on the main line will stop at this point for an indefinite period. Stretensk is on the Shilka river, a tributary of the Amur, and steamboats run in summer from the end of the railroad down the Shilka and Amur to the north end of the railroad which follows the Ussuri river to Vladivostok. Thus by rail and steamer the transcontinental line of communication is now complete from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Not far from Stretensk the line between the Siberian Railroad and Port Arthur is now constructing by the Eastern Chinese Railroad Company, and a branch will connect this line with Vladivostok. It is thus that Vladivostok will first be joined by rail with Moscow, and it is not known when the work of extending the main line beyond Stretensk, which involves very costly engineering, will be resumed. There is a short break in the main line at the south end of Lake Baikal, where the mountains press closely upon the shore, and at present large ferryboats carry trains across the lake to the rails on the east shore.

DEASY'S EXPLORATIONS IN EAST TURKISTAN.—Capt. Deasy, the English explorer, returned to London in December after two years of exploration in almost unknown parts of East Turkistan and Western Tibet, during which he travelled about 5,300 miles. After reaching the headwaters of the Yarkand river he attempted to descend this long and rapid mountain stream, flowing out into the desert, in order to map its unknown parts. Although public orders had been sent to the Chinese officials to give him every assistance, he found that private instructions had been simultaneously issued to impede his progress in all ways, and his first attempt was a failure, though he subsequently completed the exploration of the river by ascending it. Before renewing his work on the Yarkand, however, he went to Polu, near the northern frontier of central Tibet, and made a triangulation across the Kuen Lun range, collecting data needed to determine the height and position of about ninety mountains. He also discovered the source of the Khotan river. Then he carried out his final and successful explorations on the Yarkand, and later undertook further explorations in northwest Tibet, but on account of the hostility of the inhabitants he was compelled to return to India without accomplishing all he had planned to do.

THE NEW HIGHWAY IN PERSIA.—The highway from Resht, on the Caspian Sea, to Teheran, begun by the Russian Government three years ago, is now completed. Practically all the growing commerce between Russia and Persia passes over the Caspian, and it is expected that the new road will facilitate these trade relations. The *Geographische Zeitschrift* says the road is 217 miles long and great technical difficulties had to be overcome. The Persian Government controls the road and has erected nine stations along the route, where tolls are levied. The Russian officials are permitted merely to see that the road and the telegraph line are kept in repair. It is said the Russians will continue the road to Ispahan.

AFRICA.

COMPLETION OF THE SUDAN RAILROAD.—The first through train between Wady Halfa and Khartum reached the latter city on January 10, and thus steam communication between Cairo and the capital of the Egyptian Sudan is completed. It is not entirely a rail route, for a break in the railroad occurs between the First Cataract at Assuan and the Second Cataract at Wady Halfa, steamboats covering the distance between these towns. From Wady Halfa the rail route strikes straight across the desert southeast to Abu Hamed, on the Nile, and then follows the river to Khartum. The distance by rail and river is about 1,325 miles, of which the railroad from Cairo to Assuan covers 550 miles, the Nile steamers from Assuan to Wady Halfa 200 miles, and the railroad from Wady Halfa to Khartum 575 miles. Khartum may now be reached in three and a half days from Cairo, according to the published time-table, which names thirty-two hours as the time between Wady Halfa and Khartum. The doors of the Egyptian Sudan, which were closed against all the world for over fifteen years, are now opened wide by the completion of this railroad.

FRANCE'S ADVANCE IN THE SAHARA.—In November last the railroad starting from Aïn Sefra, the mountain town in south-west Algeria, was completed about twenty-five miles to the Moghar oasis, on the edge of the desert. This is the first section of the railroad that is to be extended by way of the oasis of Igli to the group of oases at Tuat. The distance from Oran, on the Mediterranean, to Tuat by rail will be about 780 miles. Meanwhile a French force has occupied the important Arab town of Insalah, 100 miles east of Tuat. In this part of the northern Sahara there are three large centres of oases, which France proposes to include in the Government of Oran. The oases of Gurara are the most northern of these groups; about 150 miles south of them is the Tidikelt group, of which

Insalah is the chief town. A little farther to the west is Tuat, the third centre of fertility. France has first established her supremacy in the central group. The three regions are believed to have about 150,000 inhabitants. These oases are of great fertility, but the political value of their subordination to the French régime will outweigh economic considerations. They have been a hotbed of conspiracy against France and the main source of the food supply of the Ahaggar Tuaregs, the most formidable foes of the Europeans in the desert.

THE SUDD IN THE NILE.—The water receipt of the Lower Nile from the great equatorial lakes is at present practically cut off. It takes nearly a year for the water from the central African lakes to reach lower Egypt, and the effect of this failure of supply from the upper river will not be felt by the farmers of Egypt till next spring and summer. The fertilizing quality of the Nile waters is derived from the Blue Nile and the Atbara, coming from the Abyssinian mountains, but a large admixture of White Nile waters is important to give the needed supply for irrigation. Mr. Willcocks, a hydrographic engineer in the service of Egypt, says the reason for the failure of the White Nile supply is that the river and its main tributaries south of 9° N. lat. are blocked by sudd for about 150 miles, and the accumulating flood has poured over the low banks into a vast swampy area, where it has rapidly evaporated. He estimates that it will cost $3,000,000 to do away with the sudd nuisance. His proposal is to dam up the entrance to the side channels, raise the banks of the main channel, and by keeping the waters from the great lakes in one channel he believes they will dispose of any amount of sudd.

COMMERCIAL GEOGRAPHY.

THE LARGEST PRODUCER OF COAL.—In 1899 the United States took its place at the head of the coal-producing countries. For thirty years Great Britain, the United States, Germany and France, the largest producers, have steadily increased their output; but no country has equalled the percentage of increase recorded in the United States, which trebled its production between 1870 and 1895, and has finally surpassed Great Britain by an enormous increase in productivity never equalled before in a single year. The United States output in 1899 was over 244,000,000 tons, which was 49,000,000 more than were mined in the preceding year. This increase in production in one year was greater than the entire average output of any country in the world excepting Great Britain during the five years 1871–5.

INTERIOR SEA PORTS.—Despatches from Berlin say that the building of the Berlin-Stettin ship canal is now assured, and a commodious harbor is to be built at Berlin. The project of making Brussels a maritime port, by means of a canal from the Scheldt, is already under way. A basin of thirty acres is to be constructed, with a depth of eighteen feet, and commodious wharves will be built. Ghent, the leading industrial city of Belgium, also on the Scheldt, is preparing to accommodate vessels 460 feet in length. A port is also under construction at Bruges, and the short canal connecting the city with the sea at Heyst is to be greatly enlarged.